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Diocesan Convention Address

— BY —

Rt. Rev. Thomas C. Darst, D. D.

Bishop of East Carolina



Read at

GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

January 28, 1931

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Brethren of the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese
of East Carolina:

“Grace be unto you, and peace from God, our
Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are meeting today in a time of unrest, confusion and fear, and I pray that God, the Holy Ghost, may guide us in our deliberations and inspire us with His wisdom that we may be enabled to carry back to our people a message so compelling in its courage, and so unfaltering in its faith, that the whole Diocese may respond with renewed consecration to the call of Christ and His Church.

As we look back over the past year, we find many reasons for real encouragement. The Confirmations have been larger than for many years; the Clergy generally have never served more faithfully; and the Laity, in many instances, have displayed real sacrificial devotion in their loyalty to the Church and its Program.

Our people generally have suffered materially; many of them have felt the pinch of genuine

poverty, and have had to make real sacrifices, involving the disruption of cherished plans for themselves and for their children.

And yet, in spite of this wide-spread condition, yes, perhaps because of this condition, I have seen a deepening of the spiritual life of this people such as I have not seen before during the sixteen years in which I have been permitted to serve you.

We have seen the crashing of financial institutions in which we trusted. We have heard the tramp of thousands of our unemployed brothers seeking a chance to live. We have seen the toil of the farmer come to naught, and we have sensed the deep silence of our closed factories and mills. We have had to face stark realities, and some of us, I believe, have made a fresh discovery of God.

It has been a time to try men's souls, and I believe we have needed such a time, a testing time, when men, shaken from false security and transient content, fall back upon God and find peace.

The easy days, so sadly abused, so wantonly squandered, are gone, and the very salvation of America may depend upon the length of time they remain away.

The hard days are here—the days of planning and thinking and giving up, the days of readjustment of living and restoration of values and discovery of self. These days are here—may we have the courage to thank God for them; may we have the wisdom to use them, not as valleys of depressions through which we toil in bitterness and defeat, but as God's own highways, over

which we march in confidence and faith to that larger life of service, that wider field of usefulness that we could have never known if we had not learned the lesson of the hard high road.

At such a time as this, we should pause and take stock of our resources. We should ask ourselves: Have I been living in a fool's paradise? Have I been depending upon temporary, transient resources? Have I anything left upon which to build my life?

Such an examination, honestly made, should lead us to a realization of the truth that we have lost nothing that is permanent, nothing that makes for character, nothing that could possibly endure for one moment after the breath leaves our body; and that we still have the possibility of possessing all things that make for the splendor of our manhood and the winning of our souls.

We still have God. We have our Master, Christ. We have membership in His body, the Church. We have our task, and we have the certainty of victory, through Faith.

In a recent issue of a financial pamphlet, I read these words: "These times test men's courage, and they test faith more than courage.

There is such a thing as being fool-hardy and calling it courage; but experience shows that our peril is the lack of faith.

It would seem as though some social leaders have no faith in America, and some Church leaders have no faith in God. A defeatist attitude denominates most enterprises for the well-being of society and the advancement of the Kingdom

of God. We are in retreat. The challenge of the sacrificial has been lost in coping with emergencies.

Reductions, Curtailments, Cuts, Discarded Programs, Abandoned Fields, Surrender, Retreat. These are the prevailing attitudes. Faith has crumpled. Men charged with great programs are panic stricken. They have lost their nerve.

Courage, Love, Spiritual Passion, Sacrifice, Religious Fervor, Service, Generosity. The sense of immediacy, the sense of Opportunity, Faith. These are the qualifications for a time like this."

God send us faith. God send us courage to thank Him for permitting us to live and labor in such a time as this.

At such a time as this, we take notice of our foundations, we dwell on the glory of our heritage; our minds swing back to the beginnings of this mighty organism, of which we are living members, the Church of the Living God.

We see a little band of men and women gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. We wait with them as they wait for the Promised Power. We see them going out from that little corner of the world in response to the marching orders of their Master. We see them go without material equipment, without influence or earthly power. We see them in complete and glad surrender to the will of God, in absolute loyalty to Christ, in utter self-forgetfulness, going forth against kingdoms of selfishness and lust and greed and sin, and we see them winning those kingdoms and transform-

ing them into the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

We speak of our sufferings, our little self denials, our inability to maintain our luxuries. God pity us for our pettiness. They thanked God that they were permitted to suffer for His sake, and even in awful flame of martyrdom they lifted their radiant faces to the throne of God and cried out their triumphant death song "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth."

At such a time as this, God is leading His Church back to the meaning of the Cross, so that it may learn again the glory of its mission; so that from the lesson of that Cross, it may march forward with fresh faith and passionate devotion to join forces with that lonely leader, Christ, who has been waiting so long for us to come.

At such a time as this we must take stock of our environment and make a survey of the conditions of our day. It does not require the skill of a keen student of human affairs to realize that conditions in our world are far from normal. Unrest and rebellion characterize a large section of the world; hate and fear permeate human society. China has her revolutions. Russia and her radical experiments are no longer distant disturbing movements to which we give casual, curious attention from time to time. Industrial revolution lifts its head in our own State and Nation, and radical influence find their way more and more into the very life of our working people. In a recent article written by my friend, Joseph Fort Newton, he said:

"As the Russian repudiation of religion may

help to renew our faith, so the up-rooting of humanity in economic and social affairs may force us to put our own house in order. It is not simply a polemic, but a portent, and if it looks at first like the idealism of hell, to ignore it is folly.

It does turn the search light on features of our own economic system which are ghastly in their injustice and brutal in their exploitation of man by man. It shows, as in a horrible apocalypse, that our selfish, individualistic commercialism, so ready to use men to make money for private gain and luxurious display, instead of using money to make men, is nothing but organized atheism. It is not only unchristian, it is inhuman.

Surely, we now know that no society has any secure future but that in which the people, all together, learn to cooperate as part of a common life for the common good. Our hope lies in a practical fraternal righteousness, in which the skill of science is employed to serve the masses of mankind. In short, our religion must first do justly, then love mercy, if it is to lead men to walk humbly with God."

We must realize that our house is not in order. With far more than half of the people in this great nation outside of any form of organized religion, with half of the people of this State owing no allegiance to any branch of God's Church. With an increasing disregard of law on the part of respectable citizens, with the appalling increase of crime among youth, with the breaking down of the standard of decency in human relations, we must know that our house is not in order, and

that the Kingdom of God on earth is still an elusive hope.

In our own Diocese, we see the need for a more compelling faith and finer measure of sacrificial devotion on the part of our people. We have held our own. We have pushed forward the boundaries of the Kingdom a little bit here and there, but we must admit, in shame and humility, that we have failed to win any great objectives for Christ and His Church. From the ignorant and the sinning, from the forgotten and the neglected, from the tenant farmer and the pale children of the mill village, the call is coming for our leadership, our loving sympathy, our Christ-like devotion to those for whom He died.

"He loved me, and He gave Himself for me" cried St. Paul out of the fulness of his grateful heart, as, in absolute surrender, he gave himself to the mighty work to which he had been divinely called. The same blessed assurance should send us out to-day, determined, at whatever cost, to play our full joyful part in carrying that blessed message to the heart of a weary, waiting world.

In the days of our prosperity, we gave, without joy and without sacrifice, to the support of the Church and the spread of the Kingdom of Christ, and because so many of us gave without this sense of privilege, the act was not sacramental, and, therefore, easily abandoned when prosperity ceased. Because our meat was not to do the will of God, we were hungry, even in our prosperity and miserable in our poverty.

Admitting our failures, we will not admit defeat; conscious of our poverty of soul, we will not

refuse to be fed; unworthy of our Sonship, we will not give up our heritage. We will, please God, go on from this place with courage and with faith to accomplish the work committed to our hands. We will clear from our souls those barriers that have blocked the way of Jesus. We will offer and present ourselves to His service. Out of our plenty, we have given with indifference; out of our poverty, we will offer with joy. We will face the problems of our day with understanding hearts, and give to a perplexed and distressed people that leadership which will enable them to find God, and in finding Him, to find peace.

Surely we can say with a measure of confidence and joy that we have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this, a time of danger and opportunity and high privilege, a time for the testing of souls. It is no time for superficialities, no time for surface contacts, but it is a time when Clergy and Laity alike must so deepen their faith and renew their courage that they may be enabled to show men and women that the only way out is the way of the Cross. It is not the easy way, but it is the only way; it is not the way the weakling would choose, but it is the way to victory.

"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

God give us faith to overcome our fears, our prejudices, and our sins. God give us faith to see and understand His plans. God give us faith to know and appreciate the power that belongs to His sons. God give us a vision of the world's need and a passion for the souls of men, for

“The great world’s heart is aching, aching fiercely
in the night,
And God alone can heal it, and God alone give
light;
And the men to bear that message, and to speak
the living word,
Are you and I, my brothers, and the millions that
have heard.

Can we close our eyes to duty? Can we fold our
hands at ease,
While the gates of night stand open to the path-
ways of the seas?
Can we shut up our compassions? Can we leave
our prayer unsaid,
Till the lands which Hell has blasted have quick-
ened from the dead?

We grovel among trifles and our spirits fret and
toss,
While above us burns the vision of the Christ up-
on the Cross;
And the blood of God is streaming from His brok-
en hands and side,
And the lips of God are saying “Tell my brothers
I have died.”

O Voice of God, we hear Thee above the shocks
of time,
Thine echoes roll around us, and the message is
sublime;
No power of man shall thwart us, no stronghold
shall dismay,
When God commands obedience and love has led
the way.”

Handwritten text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is extremely faint and illegible due to the quality of the scan. It appears to be organized into several paragraphs, with some lines possibly starting with capital letters or numbers. The right edge of the page shows a dark binding or gutter.

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